



## MAYOR AND COUNCIL AGENDA

NO. DEPT.: Community Planning and Development Services  
STAFF CONTACT: Somer Cross, Planner II

DATE PREPARED: 10/19/05  
FOR MEETING OF: 11/1/05

**SUBJECT:** Discussion of urban design recommendations to be incorporated into the Zoning Ordinance revision.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Consider and approve more particular staff recommendations from the urban design white paper.

### INTRODUCTION

At the September 19 meeting of Mayor and Council, staff presented a white paper discussion on urban design. That presentation included the current application of urban design principles in the City, and some alternative regulatory methods to enhance urban design, from both the individual regulation and the broad zoning perspective.

This presentation appends to staff's previous recommendations to provide more particular direction to the zoning revision. Upon completion of all white papers, staff will come back to the Mayor and Council to present a draft outline of the zoning text. The annotated outline will reflect these, as well as any other white paper recommendations to demonstrate how the final document will look.

### PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

Rockville has a unique quality that should be emphasized and encouraged. Not quite a true "urban center" and yet no longer a "small town," Rockville offers the best of both worlds. The zoning revision should continue to encourage the development of mixed use, urban areas like the Twinbrook Metro Area, Rockville Pike, and the Town Center, in addition to providing options for cohesive neighborhood developments, like King Farm. These areas of Rockville will encourage visitors to visit and residents to interact, because there is always something to see or do. On the other hand, the "community feel" of distinct Rockville neighborhoods should be encouraged and protected. In these neighborhoods, residents should have a pleasant streetscape to encourage walking to community centers and activity areas, where they can foster and maintain personal connection with neighbors.

As discussed in the urban design white paper, zoning is an interdependent system of regulations. Use, shape, and bulk must be considered individually and interactively. Staff recommends that different areas of the city focus on different types of regulations to create an applicable zoning code for Rockville. Some areas may focus more on use regulations while other areas of the city may focus regulations more toward form.

### GENERAL GOALS

After the first meeting of the urban design staff committee, staff identified the primary goal as promoting livability. By "livability" the intent is to provide: 1) high quality development, 2) walkability, and 3) affordability.

- **High Quality Development** - A high quality contextual style of development can mean a variety of things. In particular, high quality development ensures that there is a pleasant

street atmosphere, environmentally friendly development requirements, and flexibility in design options. The types of regulations needed to develop high quality development will be addressed through the annotated outline and drafting stage of the revision. The urban design recommendations listed below and identified in the individual neighborhood plans will give the form these regulations will take.

- **Walkability.** Walkability means providing safe, pleasant, and convenient paths to and from transit, civic and urban activity centers, work, shopping, and home. Modification of the zoning ordinance will require close review of Chapter 21 of the code, Streets and Public Improvements, in collaboration with the Department of Public Works.
- **Affordability.** Affordability means a general ability to provide quality housing and transportation options at affordable prices to the average citizen. Affordable housing means both low and moderate incomes. With regards to low income, in association with the zoning code revision, the MPDU chapter of the Code of Rockville should be reviewed. One recommendation is amending the requirements of Chapter 13 of the Code of Rockville, Moderately Priced Dwelling Units.

Planning alternatives to provide workforce housing would require a number of competing value measurements. For one, density is a concern with reasonably priced houses. Mother-in-law / accessory apartments provide the opportunity for affordable housing options but would require added densities to residential areas of the City. Additionally, special development projects also may be required, through a condition, to have affordable housing options but may request increased density or less open space to allow for such housing. This is just one consideration that will be fleshed out in the optional method follow-up presentation.

## **MORE PARTICULAR RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. Form Based Zoning Regulations**

Staff Recommendations: Form based zoning would be appropriate in certain sections of Rockville, to maintain neighborhood character and to promote infill. The following lists areas that would be ideal areas for form based zoning, and other areas where form-based zoning should be considered. Because they are prescriptive (they state what you want), rather than proscriptive (what you don't want), form-based codes can achieve a more predictable physical result than traditional Euclidian zoning. The elements controlled by form-based codes (building appearance regulations, among others) are those that are most important to shaping a high-quality built environment. Form regulations also encourage public participation because they are often easier for nonprofessionals to understand. Bulk regulations are easier to visually demonstrate so that citizens can see what will happen in their community.

#### Ideal Areas

Form-based zoning (see attached map) would be applicable in:

- a. The Rockville Pike area. The Columbia Pike Corridor regulations, in Arlington, are good examples on which to base this section of the code. Street intensity may be a means to classify different requirements; or, if form based zoning is only applied along the Pike, different sections of the Pike may require different regulations. Requirements could include ground floor retail, build-to lines, and parking in the rear of the development.

All redevelopment along Rockville Pike, would be subject to these standards. The

Twinbrook Metro Performance Area is a piece of the Rockville Pike and will await further input on the application of form regulations from the urban design plan.

- b. Town Center Metro area and, as an offshoot of that, the Stonestreet Corridor.
- c. Campus-style, industrial areas, currently zoned I-3.
- d. The area around College Plaza, currently a single-use commercial zone. The Shady Grove plan currently recommends a new metro station near the college. Even if the area continues to exist as it is, it could be a likely target for redevelopment. Form-based regulations would encourage a walkable center and high quality design for whatever may be developed there.

#### Additional Areas to Consider

- a. Some areas of I-2 and I-4, may also be ideal locations for these controls.
- b. A couple Office districts located around Town Center and Rockville Pike should be considered for form-based regulations, due to their proximity to the other proposed areas.
- b. Finally, certain commercial areas, along Rockville Pike and those that serve as neighborhood community centers, may soon be redeveloped. These areas will be considered as form-based zoning locations.

Question: Does the Mayor and Council agree with the proposed locations of form-based zoning regulations for the City, both the identified ideal and consideration areas? Are there any additional areas that should be added to this list? Are there any areas that should be removed from this list?

## **2. Transit Oriented Areas**

Staff Recommendations: Transit Oriented Areas (TOA) are already designated in the City through the Comprehensive Transportation Review. With regard to zoning, the cores of these areas (around Metro stops) are already recommended locations for form-based zoning. This type of regulation will help ensure that quality urban design is provided within a walkable radius from Metro stations by creating quality design that will attract pedestrians. Where residential areas fall within the TOA, with the exception of the Stonestreet Avenue corridor, staff recommends maintaining existing residential regulations. The East Rockville neighborhood plan recommends the continuation of residential development in these areas and a similar recommendation is likely to be included in the Twinbrook neighborhood plan.

An additional consideration for these TOAs is to update street design standards in conjunction with the zoning revision. Within a TOA, sidewalk standards will be applied to link the metro centers to shopping and residential areas. These standards should address not only the size of sidewalks but also the design of the streetscape to encourage the use of these paths.

Finally, the location of the TOAs may be identified within the Optional Method Follow-up as areas where there may be additional incentive options included in the standard optional method. In other words, to encourage the type of design the City would like to see in these areas, particular density allowances may be permitted if redevelopment in this area adds more streetscape elements.

Question: Does the Mayor and Council agree that no special zoning regulations should be applied to TOAs, except the already proposed form-based zoning regulations which will fall within the core of each TOA? This would mean that residential areas, which fall within the TOA, would remain unchanged. Street design standards, however, may be amended for these areas.

### 3. **Mixed – Use Districts**

Staff Recommendations: Staff recommends reviewing standard Commercial, Industrial, and Office districts outside the identified form-based zones, to provide for mixed uses in those districts. In addition, accessory uses in multi-family zones (R-20, R-30, R-H) should be reviewed to determine if additional small retail uses should be permitted in those zones. Limitations on the maximum size of any one use should be included in the regulations. The particulars of the allowed mix of uses will depend on the area of the City where these zones will be located. Further discussion on this topic will be addressed through the Land Use White Paper and through the drafting stage of the revision.

Question: Does the Mayor and Council agree that the zoning revision should consider allowing more mixed-use districts?

### 4. **Residential Neighborhoods**

Staff Recommendations: Though the City has developed a greater urban feel in the past few decades, the City retains a suburban element in some areas, meaning primarily residential areas where auto transit is necessary to reach any service location (stores, civic buildings, offices, etc.). One challenge facing the zoning revision is to retain the primary residential feel but to increase walkability in these neighborhoods.

Staff has reviewed the option of identifying neighborhood centers and placing special zoning regulations on these locations to increase access through walking. Neighborhood centers provide gathering places for citizens and also provide living necessities like grocery stores, activity centers, and recreation options. The concern is 1) to provide more neighborhood centers where needed and 2) to regulate to promote higher quality design and maintenance of existing centers. Street design guidelines may be amended to ensure that the areas around these centers are walkable.

Identification and re-zoning of all existing neighborhood centers is primarily a master plan process and may take more time than is available to incorporate into the comprehensive zoning revision. As an alternative, flexible regulations could be created to apply at the request of completed neighborhood plans, or by the center individually. A broad neighborhood center floating zone, an overlay district, or special incentives are options to be considered for the revision to be applied on a case-by-case basis.

Question: Should staff pursue flexible zoning regulations for the various types of neighborhood centers, to be applied as needed?

The remaining areas of residential neighborhoods would maintain existing zoning regulations. Recommendations proposed in neighborhood plans will be reviewed for particular application to individual neighborhoods. Where no neighborhood plan has yet been completed, the zoning revision will re-examine bulk requirements to determine whether these regulations are too extensive for the type of development that has appeared in each neighborhood. Where the considerations of disproportionate residential construction, reconstruction or additions are an

issue, overlay districts applying individual bulk requirements to the particular neighborhood alone may be applicable.

Question: Should the remaining residential areas of the City remain under similar regulations, as they currently exist? Modifications will be made in organization, and elsewhere where review warrants a change.

## 5. Design Guidelines

Staff Recommendations: Staff recommends applying design guidelines only to those neighborhoods that have included the recommendation in their neighborhood plan. In addition, design guidelines may continue to be a condition to special development procedure approval, as it was in the case of King Farm and Falls Grove. Design guidelines, where applicable, should be broad enough to not regulate for taste, but specific enough to provide guidance to staff and to encourage consistent review. These guidelines would be maintained outside of the code but referenced in the code to inform the public that additional considerations will be applied to development within a particular area.

Question: Does the Mayor and Council agree that design guidelines should be applied only to the individual neighborhoods, as they are requested?

Staff is considering general design regulations to be included in the code. These regulations may be included as additional dimensional standards to those already in the code. In particular, a requirement may be included that all visible sides of a structure (including visibility from railroad tracks) have a similar quality façade to the front. In other words, the sides and rear of a building must have an interesting façade, if it can be readily observed from off-site.

Question: Does the Mayor and Council agree that general design regulation, such as the requirement for visible quality facades, should be included in the revision?

## CONCLUSION

Rockville is a unique combination of urban and suburban. Zoning amendments should recognize those two aspects and regulate to emphasize the best qualities of these areas to maintain the unique character of the city. Urban design is a tool to produce a “sense of place” in a city and to ensure that development encourages livability. Livability means a quality atmosphere that promotes safety, comfort, and interest.

Established policies in the Master and neighborhood plans encourage the use of New Urbanist principles. Rockville’s established goals promote the use of zoning regulations which will meet the six principles of urban design: variety of uses, mix of densities, infill activity, contextual design, walkable centers, and enhanced streetscapes. The regulations to be adopted through the zoning revision will implement the City’s visions and enhance the existing urban design provisions of the City.

There are a number of regulation options that could be applied to implement the concepts of urban design. While the current code has focused primarily on traditional Euclidian, use centered, zoning regulations, the amendments should incorporate more New Urbanist theories of regulation. In particular form-based zoning would be applicable in certain areas of the city where the design of the building is more important than regulating use. In other areas of the city, mixed-use development should be encouraged. In residential areas, however, maintaining existing use-centered regulations as recommended by neighborhood plans is recommended. The particular regulations will be fleshed

out in the language drafting stage of the zoning revision process. Residential neighborhoods may adopt floating or overlay requirements to promote a particular character of the neighborhood. While the revision may include distinct regulations for different types of neighborhoods, the overarching goal for each district will be to promote livability.

### **QUESTIONS ASKED**

1. Does the Mayor and Council agree with the location of form-based zoning regulations for the City, both the identified ideal and consideration areas? Are there any additional areas that should be added to this list? Are there any areas that should be removed from this list?
2. Should no special zoning regulations should be applied to TOAs, except the already proposed form-based zoning regulations that will fall within the core of each TOA? This would mean that residential areas, which fall within the TOA, would remain unchanged. Street design standards, however, may be amended for these areas.
3. Should the zoning revision consider allowing more mixed-use districts?
4. Should staff pursue flexible zoning regulations for the various types of neighborhood centers, to be applied as needed?
5. Should the remaining residential areas of the City remain under similar regulations, as they currently exist? Modifications will be made in organization, and elsewhere where review warrants a change.
6. Should design guidelines be applied only to the individual neighborhoods, as they are requested?
7. Should general design regulation, such as the requirement for visible side quality facades, be included in the revision?

**NEXT STEPS:** Review remaining white papers' and issue papers' policy recommendations and proceed with drafting code outline.

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Scott Ullery, City Manager

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**LIST OF ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Proposed Form Based Zoning Districts Map